

John 1:29-34 "The Lamb of God"

JOH 1:29-34 "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

Last week we left John the Baptist fielding a number of questions from the committee which was sent from the leaders in Jerusalem as they approach John and ask him who he is and why he is baptizing people in the Jordan.

As you'll recall the baptism of John was one of repentance and it was actually an Old Testament rite that was more associated with ceremonial washings which we see especially in the Levitical law given to Israel through Moses. These washings were pictures of how sin dirties us and how we must be cleansed.

And so, these Old Testament washings or baptisms were designed to point to Christ who is able to cleanse us as He washes us from the penalty of our sin so as to present us to the Father stainless and without guilt.

Because John was conducting himself as one who had authority from God, and one who in many ways was acting like a priest in Israel, the Jewish leaders wanted to know more about him as to his status; that of Messiah, prophet or priest.

And of course he answered no to all of their questions stating that he is not the Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet. In fact, he said the one who comes after me is one whose sandals I'm not worthy to unite. In other words, Christ is so much more holy and far above him or anyone that no mere human could put himself in the same category. And of course John was alluding to the deity of Jesus Christ.

And as we come to our text we see that it is now the day after this encounter with the committee sent from Jerusalem that is recorded for us.

JOH 1:29-31 "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

This is a remarkable statement from John the Baptist. We who hear such a statement some 2,000 years later, and we who have in fact embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, don't even flinch at such a statement, but for these Jews in the first century this was radical. Let's look at the statement.

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

The first thing we notice here is that John the Baptist identifies a man as a lamb; and no mere lamb but the Lamb of God. Now, again put yourself in the shoes of these first century Jews. They were all familiar with lambs and they all understood the implications of the sacrificial lamb.

In fact, the word which is used here for lamb is the Greek word *amnos*. Though this word simply means lamb it goes a step further in identifying what type of lamb in other contexts. For example the word lamb is only used only four times in all of the New Testament.

It's used once here in our text and verse 36 of this same chapter of John. It's also used in Acts 8:32 which is a quote of Isaiah 53:7.

ISA 53:7 "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

And it's also used in 1Pet.1:9.

1PE 1:18-19 "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

The point is that Acts 8:32 and 1Pet.1:19 use the word lamb in its specific function as a sacrificial lamb as differentiated from any other lamb in general. And so, when John the Baptist uses the word lamb in our text it is sending the message to these Jews that this is no ordinary lamb, but a lamb with a function; a lamb that must die in the place of others according to the law of Moses.

And of course the context makes it abundantly clear as he goes on to say this is the Lamb of God. In other words a lamb who was sent from the Father and a lamb who was to take away the sins of the world.

Now again, we need to hear this, not as twenty first century Christians, but as first century Jews. What John is saying to these people is that this man Jesus has the ability to actually take your sins away in such a way where they will not be held against you before a holy God, and thus He can bring you before the Father guiltless.

Imagine if you met someone in the mall and they pointed to the guy who was washing the floors and they said to you, that man, who is washing the floors, is actually a special messenger sent from God and this man has the authority and power to declare you not guilty before your creator.

Aside from our first reaction that this person who is talking to you in the mall is not all there, you would then have to wonder how in the world a floor washer could forgive your sins let alone the entire world's.

And what we find is that there are Jews who will think that both John and Jesus are out of their minds for making such declarations. And yet, there were Jews who listened and believed. And one of the reasons they were interested in such bold statements, as the one John the Baptist makes in our text, is because the Jews in Israel knew that such a special messenger from God was to appear on the horizon.

Many of them were looking for the Messiah. Many, if not most of the Jews, were ready to be delivered from the yoke of Rome and have Israel and specifically Jerusalem placed back in the prominence they once enjoyed under King David and Solomon.

And now, this John the Baptist is preaching that the Messiah has come. But in announcing His coming he is also announcing His task, that of a sacrifice for them and the rest of the world.

The sacrificial lamb had no other purpose. It was bred to die on behalf of others. And Jesus, the very Son of God, took on flesh as He was born to die for you and me.

John then goes on to explain this Lamb of God.

JOH 1:30 "This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me."

Now as we saw last week Jesus Christ did not come before John, chronologically. Jesus was six months younger than his cousin John. And Jesus did not come before John in terms of when His ministry started since John has been baptizing for some time before Jesus ever comes on to the scene.

So, what does John the Baptist mean when he says that this Lamb of God came before him? Simply this, that this Lamb of God, is none other than God who has existed forever, long before John.

And by the way, Jesus Himself would confirm this to the Jews, which in turn did not make Him very popular.

John 8:56-59 ⁵⁶"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad." ⁵⁷So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" ⁵⁸Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." ⁵⁹Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

But back to our text.

JOH 1:31 "I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

In what way did John not know Jesus? Well, keep in mind that Jesus and John were related through their mothers. The angel, who told Mary that she was going to have a child as she would be conceived by the Holy Spirit, pointed this out to her.

LUK 1:35-37 The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. 37 For nothing is impossible with God."

Mary knew Elizabeth. They were family and friends.

LUK 1:39-42,56 "At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home."

Being family it is more than likely that Jesus and John grew up together in relative close proximity to one another. This doesn't mean they were neighbors and saw each other every day, but like family does, they certainly saw each other and played with each other during those special times during the year.

Like our Thanksgiving and Christmas and other such holidays, they probably saw each other at Passover, Yom Kippur and other special days of the Jewish calendar. They were not strangers. And yet John can say in verse 31, "I myself did not know him..."

What does he mean by this? It's really rather simple. How had John known Jesus for all of those years through their boyhood's and now as adults? He knew Jesus as his cousin and friend. But John never knew Jesus as Messiah because Jesus had not revealed His ministry as Messiah until now.

John certainly knew that Jesus was special. Imagine having a sinless friend and relative. And keep in mind that both Elizabeth and Mary probably shared with their sons certain things of their encounters with God and the promises He gave them.

But now, for the first time John would come to know this Jesus in such a way that he had not known Him before; as the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. And for this reason, John says in verse 31, "I came baptizing with water [so] that he might be revealed to Israel."

John knew he was called by God to be the voice in Israel to announce Christ's coming at this particular time. And for this reason he is calling Israel to repent and come humbly to this Messiah.

But notice how John finally realizes that his cousin is the one who is none other than the One whom God had sent into this world with such an awesome task.

JOH 1:32-34 "Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

What is John referring to here? He is referring to the time in which John baptized Jesus in the Jordan river. The gospel of John doesn't make direct reference to that incident, but we know this is what John the Baptist is referring to.

MAT 3:13-16 "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. 16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him."

So, what we have here is John's testimony after the fact. John is recounting what has happened since he already baptized Jesus. And so, at this point in our text, this is at least forty days after Jesus was baptized since we know that Jesus immediately went into the wilderness after His baptism in the Jordan, where He would be tempted by Satan.

But the point here is that John, though he may have guessed that Jesus was the Messiah, was now made certain through this special sign from the Father where the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus and John saw Him as a dove.

And evidently the Father had previously told him to look for this sign and when he saw it he would know that this was the Father's choice. That's what we're told in verse 33.

JOH 1:33 "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'

And notice the contrast between their two ministries. John's ministry was to declare the Lamb of God and he did this through a sign that was administered to the outside of a person, that of water.

Jesus would be empowered by the Holy Spirit in such a way where He would deal with the inside of a person as He gave them a new nature and a new life in Himself. And part of that life involved Him being able to give us the Holy Spirit of God.

This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote to the church in Ephesus.

EPH 4:30 "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

By the way, the word sealed here in Eph.4:30 is a word that signifies being sealed for security purposes. In other words, nothing will be able to unseal us from God because He is the One who has secured us to Himself. This is what Paul would bring out to the Romans.

ROM 8:35,38-39 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now, back in our text, there are a couple of things I want to address. The first one is how John recognizes that Jesus is the promised One from the Father. It says, in verse 32, "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him."

It should be noted that God is Spirit and no one has ever seen Him in His very essence as Spirit. In fact, John points this out in this chapter which we discussed a couple of weeks ago.

JOH 1:18 "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known."

It wasn't until Jesus took on flesh that mankind was able to see the veiled glory of God in a very unique way. But all throughout the bible the Lord is seen to reveal Himself in ways which men can identify with in human terms.

And this is what God has done for John the Baptist. Obviously the Holy Spirit is not a dove or any other winged creature. But so as to help John understand the working of God in the life of Jesus John was able to actually see something which was miraculous in nature to identify Jesus as the Christ.

It's not unlike how the disciples were in the upper room after the resurrection of Jesus Christ on the day of Pentecost as they were waiting for power from on high so as to accomplish their ministries for God.

ACT 2:1-4 "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

Here, instead of a dove or doves descending upon the disciples, it was something like tongues of fire literally seen by all in that room. It was God's way of helping them not only to experience the filling of the Spirit but to see that God is actually working in their lives in a special way.

This is what God did for John the Baptist to increase his faith and give him the assurance that Jesus was the anointed One.

By the way, it is interesting to note that in the case of the disciples seeing tongues of fire above their heads, fire is seen as judgment in the bible. But it's also seen as refining or cleansing through intense heat.

The disciples, though cleansed by the blood of the lamb, were still sinners. And so, part of what they saw was the Holy Spirit's ministry of refining them on a daily basis and thus conforming them into the image of Christ.

However, since Jesus had never sinned the sign we see associated with Him is not a tongue of fire representing the Holy Spirit, but a dove which represents purity and peace.

In the Song of Solomon, Solomon uses the dove to identify his love.

SON 2:14 "My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely."

Christ's earthly ministry was one of peace and reconciliation and the Spirit of God would assist Him in this endeavor as Jesus would be associated with loveliness and purity and innocence from anything sinful.

But this does raise another question which is my second point concerning this incident that John alludes to here in our text, and it has to do with why Jesus had to be baptized. This is what we just read a moment ago in Matthew.

MAT 3:13-14 "Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."

Jesus being baptized was in fulfillment of the law of Moses, which is what the statement, fulfill all righteousness, means.

But I thought John's baptism was a baptism of repentance and a baptism which pointed out the need to be cleansed from sin. Jesus had never sinned. Why should He be baptized?

Here's the reason. Though Jesus never sinned He came into this world to take our sin. He became identified with our sin by becoming our substitute. This is part of what it means to be baptized. The word baptism essentially means three things: union, fellowship, and identification.

If Jesus was to be our substitute then He had to fulfill all that the law spoke to human beings, and specifically to the Jews. Remember, that as a good Jew you had to partake in every detail of the law. Yom Kippur, which is the Day of Atonement, had to be celebrated by every Jew which was a day that spoke of them being forgiven of their sin.

Jesus had to partake of that as well, though He needed no atonement. He had to partake of the Passover like every other Jew though He needed no blood covering to deliver Him from bondage.

Christ kept the law perfectly, because the law was designed for man. And the Son of God was in fact fully man as well as fully

God, and so He was obligated to keep the law as He identified Himself with man in every way.

Remember what Jesus said in MAT 5:17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

And He did fulfill the law perfectly. And so, according to the law, Jesus came to John the Baptist and identified Himself as one of us who needed cleansing, though He had no sin. And essentially what Jesus was declaring in that act is that man needs such cleansing. And because it would turn out that He didn't He was now a suitable sacrifice to stand in our place and pay our debt in full.

2CO 5:21 "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

GAL 3:13 "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree."

John the Baptist realized that his cousin, Jesus, was none other than the one who would take his curse so that he, along with the rest of the world, could be reconciled back to his God and Creator.

He most certainly had in mind that promise and prophecy regarding the Lamb of God who came to take his sin and ours found in Isaiah.

ISA 53:6-7 "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

But now John can say that he has met this lamb whom Isaiah spoke of and He is the Anointed Son of God.

JOH 1:34 "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."

John was an eye-witness and personally was able to testify that Jesus is the Son of God.

Peter would also testify to this.

MAT 16:15-17 "But what about you?" [Jesus] asked. "Who do you say I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."

You and I in Christ have been shown by the Father that Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, just as was John the Baptist. Because John knew the Christ he was willing to serve His Master all his days as he decreased and Jesus increased.

And that should be our desire as well as we give God praise and adoration and thanks for all His goodness. David put it this way.

PSA 72:17-19 "May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. 18 Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. 19 Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen."